

While these figures do not give the full picture, they do show where the concentrations of runaways are located. They also indicate that around 50 percent, and perhaps more, of the plants and employment relate to IUE's industry.

Wages to the Mexican workers run from \$2.25 (unskilled) to \$2.70 (skilled) per day. Added to this is 75 cents daily social security tax, paid by the employer. The workers work six days a week, but are paid for seven. Thus, a skilled electronics worker is paid around \$24.15 a week, including the layaway for social security.

If one hunts, however, he can find even cheaper rates. Transitron, for instance, hired its first Mexican workers—34 women—to train as assembly line supervisors at a rate of \$2.08 per day.

Mexico requires that PRONAF companies pay wages 50 percent higher than the regional minimum. Nevertheless, U.S. employers aren't breaking any records—even by local standards. Bus drivers in Tijuana, for instance, earn \$10 a day.

Some of the factory owners niggling out those pennies are (in the old paternalistic tradition) quite generous in their praise of the intelligence and productivity of the people on the receiving end. One knowledgeable Tijuana entrepreneur said he was "absolutely astounded" by the efficiency of his Mexican "help." "What it takes eight weeks for American assembly workers to learn required just six weeks in Tijuana," he said.

As for profits, well, there's not much information available, but Enrique Meier, a Mexican who helped set up four PRONAF operations, put the *average* return on investment at 120 percent in two years!

The shortage of hard, verifiable information about the border runaways partly stems from the fact that neither the Mexican Government nor U.S. managements are eager to tell the U.S. labor movement who's there and to what extent. Part of it (a lesser part) probably is attributable to a U.S.-Mexican (or English-Spanish) communications gap. But even our government, which should be ready to serve the workingman and his unions, has no publicly available collected body of information on American firms operating along the border.

IUE District 12 President Bill Drohan, who has visited the PRONAF scene at Mexicali, Tijuana and Nuevo Laredo, says many of the plants are hard to find and harder to identify, even with the help of a Spanish-speaking staffer. What with many of the companies operating under Mexican names, neither phone books nor signs on buildings help much.

Reporters from daily newspapers also have noted the secrecy angle. After commenting last year that its two Tijuana plants were quite successful, Litton Industries turned back followup inquiries and refused to permit reporters and photographers to come inside.

The fact is, the fast growth of this industrial weed patch, the exploitation of Mexicans involved and its real and potential devastation of U.S. jobs and benefits is a subject that cries out for Congressional airing. Letters from union members to their Senators and Representatives are called for.

TWIN-PLANT OPERATIONS DEVELOPING

One aspect of the border expansion has been the development of twin-plant operations in which both initial and final production stages are handled on the U.S. side, with intricate hand-labor operations performed in Mexico. An example of the twin-plant setup is Transitron's at Laredo, Texas (75 people) and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico (1,500).

American business groups and municipalities have been seeking federal funds for studies that would help advance the development of more such operations.

While our government does not officially promote PRONAF, federal officials provide advice and information to potential runaways. Moreover, the government's response to U.S. labor's calls for action to stop this plant piracy has been unenthusiastic, to say the least. Although the AFL-CIO had brought the problem to government officials months before, the best the State Department could report following the December meeting of the Joint Mexican-United States Trade Committee was this pallid paragraph:

"Among other matters related to trade, the Committee discussed the Mexican programs related to industrialization of the border areas. In this connection, it was agreed that the two delegations would recommend to their governments the fullest possible exchange of information on the progress of the programs, and their economic and social effects on both sides of the border."